

VZCZCXRO4534
RR RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR RUEHTRO
DE RUEHUB #0361/01 1701858
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 191858Z JUN 09
FM USINT HAVANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4494
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUCOWCV/CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUCOGCA/COMNAVBASE GUANTANAMO BAY CU
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000361

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CCA
DEPT FOR EEB/ESC/TFS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/18/2029
TAGS: [EINT](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [CU](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: CUBANS DISAPPOINTED BY MICROSOFT; INSPIRED BY IRAN

HAVANA 00000361 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: COM Jonathan Farrar for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) The decision by Microsoft and others to block certain internet communication services in Cuba works directly against U.S. goals to advance people-to-people interaction. The growing Cuban virtual community has privately and publicly expressed its disappointment. Bloggers remain undeterred, however, in their effort to break Cuba's information blockade and are inspired by current events in Iran and the expanded use of mobile phones to receive and transmit information. This cable contains an action request in paragraph 6. End Summary.

DOING THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT'S WORK FOR THEM

12. (C) Cuban bloggers Yoani Sanchez and Claudia Cadelo recently expressed disappointment in Microsoft's decision to block access to Windows Live Instant Messenger for internet users in Cuba (and other state sponsors of terrorism) through their respective blogs, Generacion Y and Octavo Cerco. The Cuban Government strictly controls internet usage and restricts access to several internet sites (including many blogs), even for tourists in Cuban hotels. In shutting down Instant Messenger, both bloggers commented that Microsoft is in effect doing the work of Cuban Government censors for them. The bloggers worry that potential further action to avoid violations of the U.S. embargo by foreign internet and software companies may negatively affect the growing cyber community in Cuba. Tech savvy Cubans can get around the restrictions by using proxy servers based outside Cuba or third party messenger hosts, but most Cubans are simply forced to do without.

13. (C) Microsoft and other providers of similar free, downloadable software (Note: Google Talk is also blocked. End Note) claim that the encrypted code used in these programs is restricted by U.S. Export Administration

Regulations. The Cuban official press predictably (and hypocritically) took advantage of the situation to criticize Microsoft's decision as "the latest turn of the screw in the United States' technological blockage against the island" and "a truly harsh violation" of Cuba's rights. Publicity around Microsoft's decision comes at a critical time in U.S.-Cuba relations as we await the pending implementation of the policy changes announced by the White House on April 13 to "authorize greater telecommunications links with Cuba to advance people-to-people interaction at no cost to the U.S. government." Furthermore, Claudia Cadelo wrote in her June 10 blog that she had heard rumors that the social networking site Facebook may follow Microsoft's example. Operating a Facebook account does not require the user to download any software. Thus, Facebook does not share the same concerns related to export restrictions as the downloadable messenger sites. Per conversations with the Department, Facebook reported this week that it blocks Cuban access to applications and advertising, but not to normal social networking operations. We understand from Cuban contacts that Cubans continue to successfully access Facebook accounts, although a local USINT employee tried to sign up for an account at a hotel on June 17 and received a message from Facebook that he was "ineligible to sign up."

INSPIRED BY IRAN

14. (C) At the same time, Cuban bloggers are paying close attention to current events in Iran, in particular the use of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and mobile phones to inform and influence domestic and international opinion. Yoani Sanchez wrote in her blog on June 17 that what is

HAVANA 00000361 002.2 OF 002

happening in Iran and its dissemination through the Internet is a lesson for Cuban bloggers. Sanchez told us separately that the use of mobile phones (including iphones) to transmit information, share blogs, and even access the internet is a significant and growing phenomenon in Cuba. As a great source of information hidden by the official press, she also praised the new service called "Granpa" (www.granpa.info) that sends news articles to Cuban mobile phones via SMS text messages (Note: USINT staff have since signed up for this service and receive several articles a day. As of yet, neither we nor our contacts know who runs Granpa. End Note.) She lamented, however, that Cuba was clearly not yet at the same level of connectivity as Iranian society.

15. (SBU) Cuban dissidents are also following developments in the cyber community. Well known dissident Oswaldo Paya published, through the blog Bitacora, a message of solidarity with the Cuban blogger community in early June. Paya urged bloggers to "be the voice of those who have no blog" and congratulated them for "this initiative to proclaim the people's right to the internet and for their courage in the struggle for the liberation of truth, which is imprisoned in Cuba."

COMMENTS AND ACTION REQUEST

16. (C) The Cuban government continues to see the internet as a threat and remains committed to restricting and controlling access. Internet communication and social networking sites are becoming more and more popular in Cuba as a means of communicating across the island and accessing family, friends, and information from off the island. This new media is important not just for increasing people-to-people contact, but also for helping Cubans share their stories and as a way to inform, organize, and mobilize civil society. ACTION REQUEST: Post requests Department assistance in removing any regulatory obstacles that limit Cuban access to free internet communications without jeopardizing national

security.

¶7. (C) Cuban state telecommunications monopoly ETECSA announced earlier this year that it hopes to add 250,000 new mobile phone users in 2009, which is nearly twice as many new subscribers as in 2008 and a 50 percent increase over the current total (about 470,000). We hear that within days ETECSA may announce a significant drop in prices for initiating service and making international calls in an effort to capture more hard currency. In this context, a liberal implementation of the changes in U.S. policy announced on April 13 regarding telecommunications may help facilitate Iran-style democratic ferment in Cuba.
FARRAR